

HA-1311

Bel Air M.E.Church
20 N. Main Street
Bel Air, Maryland 21014

This ca. 1888 brick church is significant for several reasons: it represents the continuous tradition of Methodist churches on this site since the town of Bel Air was laid out, and its design was taken from the Methodist Board of Church Extension catalogue. The latter provided Methodist congregations with patterns for "convenient and tasteful churches" that could be built cheaply and solidly and thus facilitate the construction of churches in places where congregations might not otherwise be able to. This is the first Methodist Church in Harford County to be documented as a pattern book church from the Methodist Board of Church Extension catalogue. It is also the only brick Gothic church in the town of Bel Air and an important component of Main Street. The block that this church is in has several other handsome 19th century structures, and the composite provides a rare glimpse of 19th century Bel Air.

INVENTORY FORM FOR STATE HISTORIC SITES SURVEY

1 NAME

HISTORIC

AND/OR COMMON

Bel Air Methodist Episcopal Church in Harford County

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

20 N. Main St.

CITY, TOWN

Bel Air,

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Maryland

COUNTY

Harford

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

☐ DISTRICT
☒ BUILDING(S)
☐ STRUCTURE
☐ SITE
☐ OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

☒ PUBLIC
☐ PRIVATE
☐ BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

☐ IN PROCESS
☐ BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

☐ OCCUPIED
☒ UNOCCUPIED
☐ WORK IN PROGRESS
☒ ACCESSIBLE
☐ YES: RESTRICTED
☐ YES: UNRESTRICTED
☐ NO

PRESENT USE

☐ AGRICULTURE ☐ MUSEUM
☐ COMMERCIAL ☐ PARK
☐ EDUCATIONAL ☐ PRIVATE RESIDENCE
☐ ENTERTAINMENT ☐ RELIGIOUS
☐ GOVERNMENT ☐ SCIENTIFIC
☐ INDUSTRIAL ☐ TRANSPORTATION
☒ OTHER not used

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Harford County Government

Telephone #: 838-6000

STREET & NUMBER

45 S. Main St.

CITY, TOWN

Bel Air,

VICINITY OF

STATE, zip code
Maryland 21014**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Harford County Courthouse

Liber #: 857

Folio #: 169

STREET & NUMBER

40 South Main St.

CITY, TOWN

Bel Air,

STATE
Maryland 21014**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

DATE

☐ FEDERAL ☐ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☐ LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

HA-1311

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

This Methodist brick church, located on the west side of N. Main Street in Bel Air in Harford County, Maryland, was built in 1888 to a pattern from the Board of Church Extension catalogue. With a 70 foot projecting tower on the northwest corner, and an early 20th century and a mid-20th century addition added on to the rear (or west side), the structure is a dignified proponent of the Methodist Episcopal faith, as the plans promised. Set on a low stone foundation, the brick is laid in common bond with seven rows of stretchers; all openings except those in the basement have brick pointed arches.

The facade or east side has three parts separated by buttresses: the tower containing the entrance; the gabled central section with a large stained glass window; and a flat-roofed section with false pediment, a fantastical tower-like brick chimney, and a blocked-up entrance below a smaller triangular window. In the center section are two basement windows with granite lintels, and the cornice has exposed eaves with brackets at both ends.

The tower, with buttresses at the three exposed corners, contains a twelve panel, double-leaf door in a recessed panel on the east side and a window in the north side of the first story.¹ Each side of the tower's second story has two windows below a circular, stained glass window. The top of the tower consists of a shingled base with a louvered opening in each side, capped by a spire with gables containing recessed arches on each side and, finally, a weathervane.

Both ends of the original section are the same with four stained glass windows separated by buttresses; most of the basement windows have been blocked up.

The seventy year old, one-room addition with a gable roof is flush with the south side. Five bays long and four bays wide, each pair of windows is flanked by buttresses. The windows have 1/1 sash and plain, wide trim. The south side has a door with a shed-roofed portico in the east bay. The exposed gable end (i.e. the west end) is shingled. On the north is a one-story shed-roofed addition that may have been built at the same time.

The 1950's addition is attached to the north end of the west side.

On the interior, which has been partitioned into cubicles for use as a school, most of the original fabric is extant. The tower contains a vestibule with a nine-panel, pointed arch door to the basement in the west wall and a trap door to the tower in the ceiling. The rest of the original structure was apparently one large room, with a wooden Gothic open work ceiling with arches containing trefoils and, in the ridge, crosses within circles. The original stained glass windows have been replaced. The imitation cherry beaded board wainscot matched the original pews. In both corners of the west end are doors, with a large arched opening in the center, which held the choir when the second addition was built. The basement has been completely remodelled.

The rear section has one large room with a vestibule in the southeast corner, and a through hall leading to the most recent wing in the north.

¹ Over the door is a brick from the first Methodist College, Cokesbury College, founded in 1785, in Abingdon, Md. It burned soon after its founding.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

HA-1311

PERIOD		AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

When Aquilla Scott laid out the town of Bel Air from his share of "Scott's Improvement Enlarged", Lot No. 2 went in 1789 to Dr. Phillip Henderson, Bernard Preston, Jr., H. Henry Preston, Jr., Henry Watters, Sr., Walter Watters, Joseph Toy, Daniel Ruff, and John Hargrove - all Methodists-for the sum of one shilling sterling money. According to one church history, the congregation may have been there long before that. It was called the Bel Air Methodist Church in Harford County until, in 1873, it responded to the schism in Methodist faith and became the Bel Air Methodist Episcopal Church in Harford County. (The other strain is also represented in Bel Air by the Grace Methodist Protestant Church).

The church's historian, Charles D. Lee, wrote that it was a sign of the church's fortitude and "rich sacred history" that "new buildings have been erected and improvements made whenever the need demanded." Indeed, the Bel Air Methodist Church has changed shape continuously since its inception. There is no record of the original structure or whether it was remodelled or entirely rebuilt in 1856, when records indicate major improvements on the lot. However, the present church, whose corner stone was laid in 1888 is well documented.

The design of this structure was from the catalogue of the Methodist Board of Church extension, which assisted new congregations with erecting and financing their churches. In 1877, the Board began to furnish standardized plans, and by 1886 the catalogue offered 309 plans for the cost of \$2 to \$50, for buildings ranging from a cost of \$300 to \$30,000. A local newspaper article reported that the contractor Clinton Smith built this church to the design #47B by the Philadelphia architect, J. A. Price. Examination of the pattern (attached) reveals that indeed the church was based on pattern #47B, with the single apparent difference being the absence of the lecture room on the north.

68 feet long¹ (or 60 feet² according to one description, a figure that probably excluded the pulpit) and 36 feet wide, with a 70 foot tower, the church was built at a cost of \$6500³ or \$8000⁴. The windows were of rolled cathedral glass. The designs of the side and west windows symbolized the Trinity; over the pulpit was a window representing the descent of the Holy Spirit, and on the upper part of the east window was a cross and crown. Over one door light shone through an open bible. The news of imitation cherry (like the wainscot) were arranged in two sections perpendicular to the side walls, with a center and two side aisles. The altar was on a straight line at the front and the pulpit was slightly recessed, with the desk aligned with the front walls. The door was in the center to the right of the chancel, and there was a large chandelier hanging from the ceiling.

Alterations in 1900-1908 entailed a new Sunday School at the rear, a redesigned chancel to conform with two pews in a circular arrangement, and the placement of the choir to the rear of the pulpit. The south entrance on the front may have been blocked up then.

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET #1

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Manual of the Methodist Episcopal Church, A Quarterly Magazine, N.Y., Phillips & Hart, vols. I-VIII, 1880-1888.
"165th Anniversary of Bel Air Methodist Church: 1789-1954"; pub.1954
Wright, C. Milton, Our Harford Heritage, 1967.
Catalogue of Architectural Plans for Churches and Parsonages furnished by the Board of Church Extension M.E. Church for the Year 1889, Church Ext. Office, 1026 Arch St., Phila., Pa.
CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY _____

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	COUNTY
STATE	COUNTY

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE
Natalie Shivers, Historic Site Surveyor

ORGANIZATION
Historic District Commission

DATE
6/22/79

STREET & NUMBER
45 South Main St.

TELEPHONE
838-6000 Ext. 207

CITY OR TOWN
Bel Air,

STATE
Maryland 21014

The Maryland Historic Sites Inventory was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature, to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 Supplement.

The Survey and Inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

RETURN TO: Maryland Historical Trust
The Shaw House, 21 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
(301) 267-1438

Apparently the exterior of the church had been painted, since it was mentioned that the paint was cleaned off and the brick exposed in 1939. In 1951, "artistic stained glass windows" were installed because the others were in disrepair. The tower was also changed at some point. According to a picture postcard taken when there were still horses and buggies on the streets, the third story of the tower had two large, louvered openings with trefoil arches on each side, and pinnacles on each corner of the spire base. The church was not painted in this picture.

Behind the church was a small churchyard. When it was closed and whether the bodies were reburied elsewhere is unknown. However, the graves and gravestones of Jacob Norris (an officer in the Revolutionary Army, d. 1807), James Johnson, and John Montgomery (State's Attorney for Harford County, three-term Mayor of Baltimore, and United States Congressman, d. 1828) and his family were still there until the most recent addition was built 25 years ago. (The bodies are now buried in the Mt. Carmel Cemetery).

This church is significant, then, for two reasons: 1. Historically, because it represents the continuous tradition of Methodist Churches on this site since the town of Bel Air was laid out and, as such, is an important part of Harford County's Methodist heritage, 2. Architecturally, because its design was taken from the Board of Church Extension catalogue and is exemplary of the "convenient and tasteful churches" that could be built cheaply and well from a standardized pattern—a common trend at that time. This is the first Methodist Church in Harford County to be documented as a pattern book church from the Methodist Board of Church Extension catalogue. Furthermore, the church is unique as the only brick Gothic church in the town of Bel Air. Not only that, but is a vital component of Bel Air's Main Street, which has very few 19th century structures that bear any resemblance to their original shape. The block that this church is in has several other handsome old structures, and the composite represents a rare glimpse of 19th century Bel Air.

FOOTNOTES

¹ "165th Anniversary of Bel Air Methodist Church 1789-1954".
pub. 1954.

² Harford Democrat, Oct. 12, 1888.

³ ibid.

⁴ op-cit.: 165th Anniversary.

HA-1311



HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

J. Thomas Barranger
County Executive

July 12, 1979

RECEIVED

JUL 17 1979

MARYLAND HISTORICAL
TRUST

Pamela James
Maryland Historical Trust
21 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Pamela:

Enclosed is the nomination form for the Bel Air Methodist Episcopal Church (with a significance statement revised in light of the discovery of the pattern for the church). I am also enclosing the pattern #47 from the Catalogue of Architectural Plans for Churches and Parsonages furnished by the Board of Church Extension M. E. Church for the year 1889. If you need anything else, please let me know.

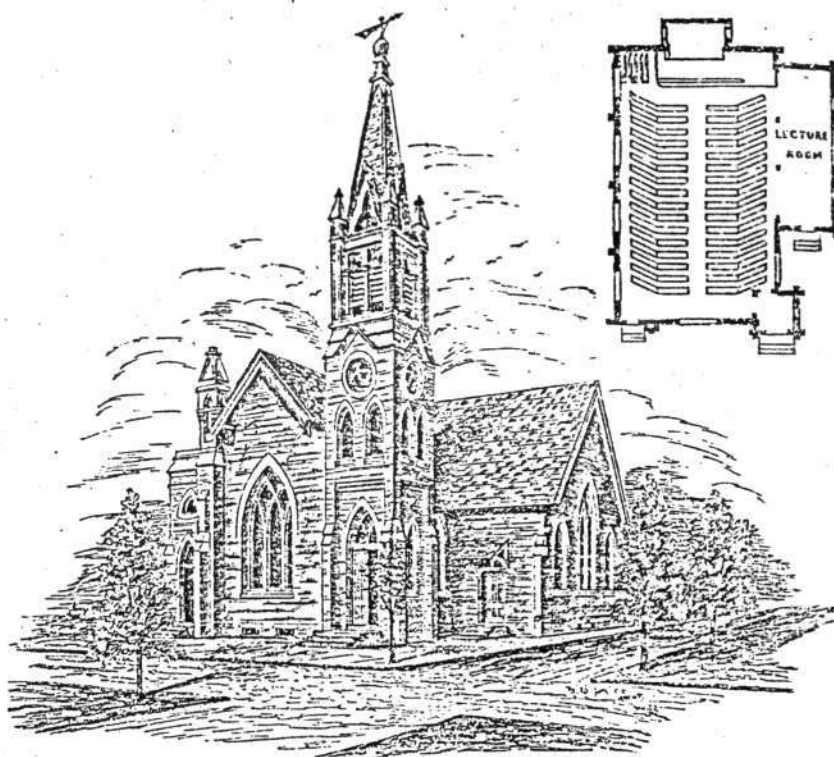
Sincerely,

Natalie

Natalie Shivers
Historic Sites Surveyor

NS/nk
Enclosure

HA-1311



CHURCH PLAN, No. 47 A.—PERSPECTIVE AND GROUND PLAN.

Price List,	{	No. 47, \$20.	Plans for Brick.
		No. 47 A, \$25.	" " " or frame.
		No. 47 B, \$30.	" " Brick.

The tower is 10x10 feet, 70 feet high. The walls are 16 feet. The ceilings of No. 47 and No. 47 A, are plainly plastered, 24 feet high in the middle. The ceiling of No. 47 B, is 30 feet high in the middle, lined with wood. The rafters being exposed and ornamented.

No. 47 is 36x55 feet; it contains 280 full seats in the pews. It contains but one room, the lecture-room being omitted.

No. 47 A, is 36x60 feet; it contains 310 full seats in the pews. The lecture-room is 14x36 feet, connecting with the auditorium by folding doors making all the space available.

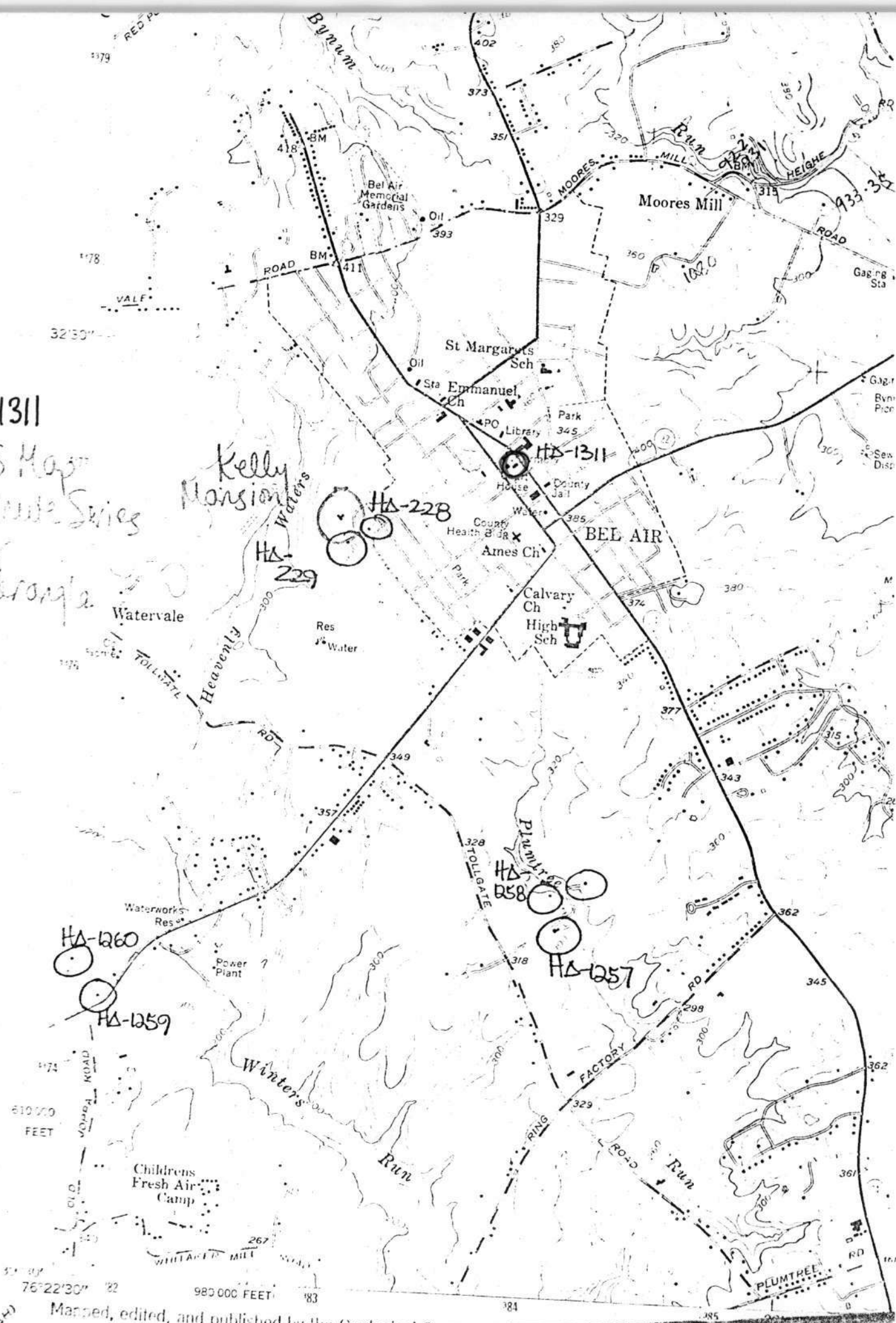
No. 47 B, is 36x60 feet; it contains 310 full seats in the pews. The lecture-room is 20x36 feet, connecting with the auditorium by folding doors.

The sizes above given do not include the pulpit recess, which projects 6 feet.

Where labor and materials are cheap, No. 47 will cost about \$4,000 and No. 47 B, about \$6,000.

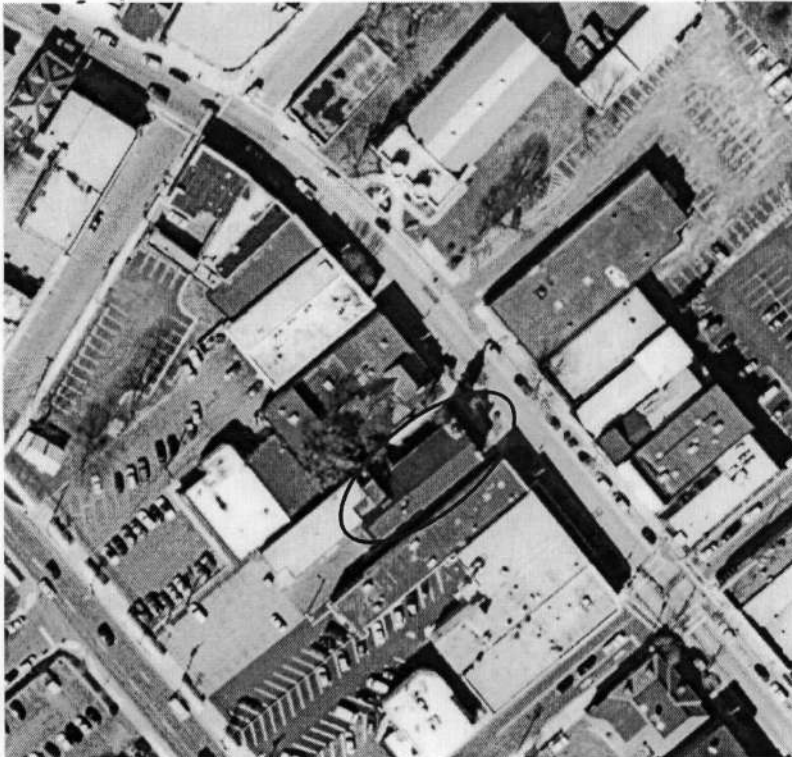
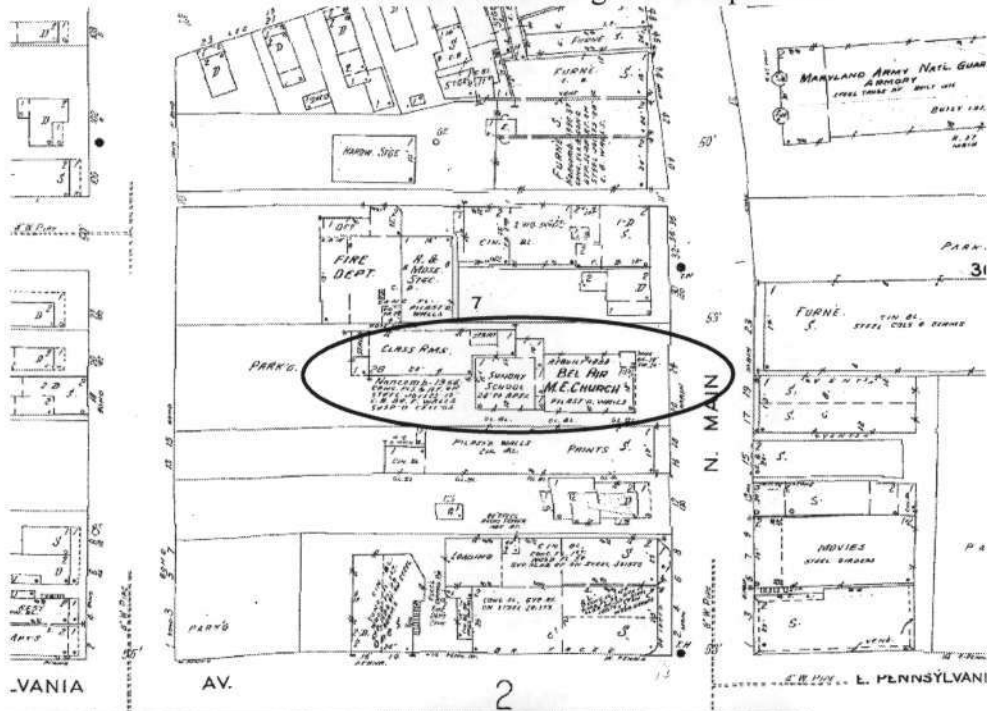
See No. 48.

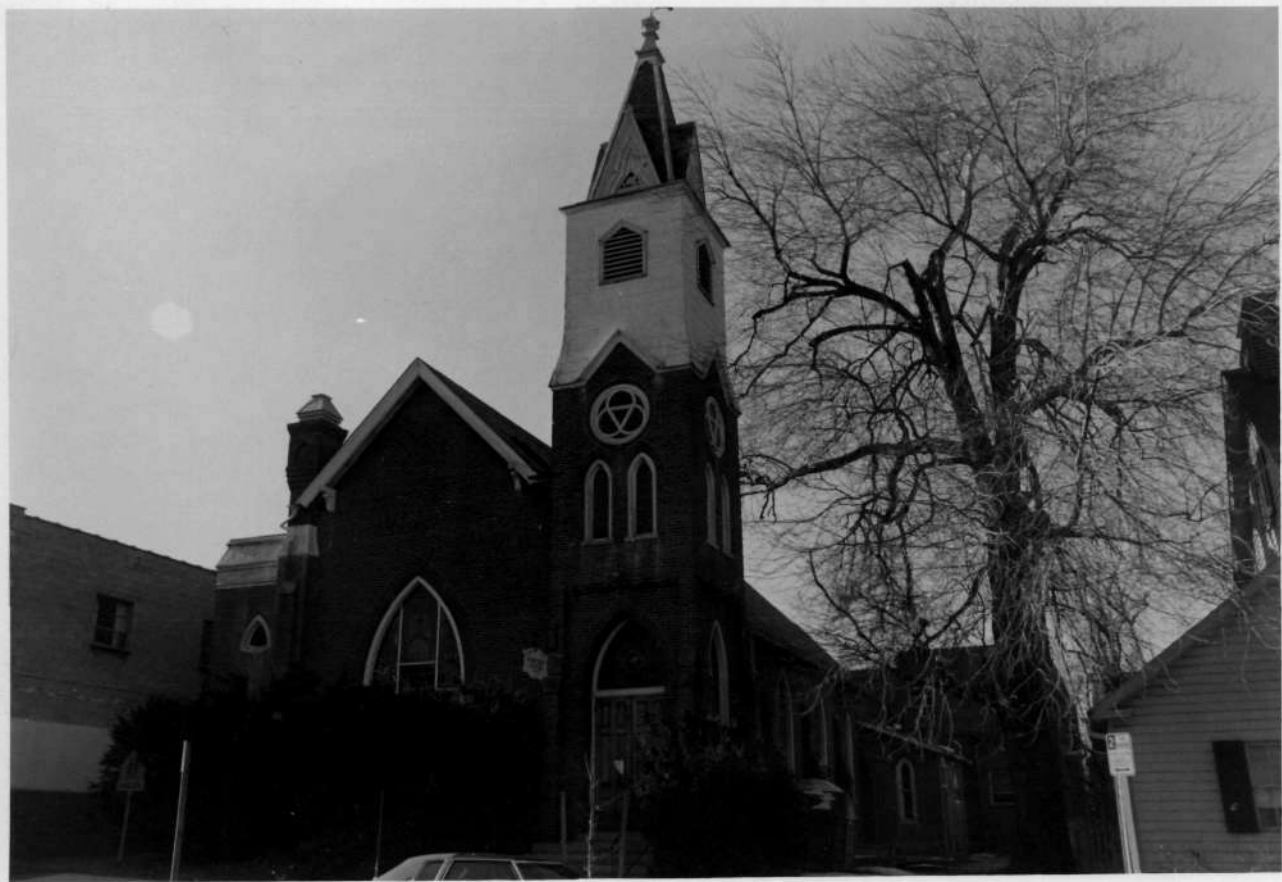
USGS Map
7.5 Minute Series
Bel Air
Quadrangle



HA-1311
Bel Air M.E. Church
20 N. Main St.
Bel Air
Harford County

Sanborn Bel Air Aug. 1930-Sept. 1961





Bel Air M.E. Church HA- 1311
Bel Air, Md. 21014
January, 1979
N. Shivers
East end, north side



Bel Air M.E. Church HA- 1311

Bel Air, Md. 21014

January, 1979

N. Shivers

West end & south side (of early
20th c. addition)